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Consumer anger: A label in search of meaning

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Abstract

Purpose – The paper proposes a new conceptualisation of consumer anger directed against a company.

Design/methodology/approach – An integrative review of the literature on anger in marketing is conducted.

Findings – Anger at the firm is experienced in two forms: *vengeful* anger or *problem-focused* anger. The motivational goals associated with each differentiate between the two types and lead to different relational consequences: *vengeful* anger implies a desire to hurt the culprit while *problem-focused* anger requires solely the attainment of a thwarted goal. The two types are associated with different patterns of appraisals, levels of intensity, and emotion expression. These differences, documented in the literature, are not universal but shaped by contextual and personal variables. Although marketers conflate these two types of anger under the same label, only *vengeful* anger represents a threat to marketing relationships while *problem-focused* anger has positive consequences if managed appropriately.

Research implications – Studies that examine anger will benefit from a more nuanced understanding of this concept. This paper raises important implications for the measurement of this emotion since existing scales are not able to measure the goals associated with the two types of anger.

Practical implications – The insights presented help managers form strategies to address consumer anger in contexts such as service failures and/or crisis communications.

Originality/value – The paper extends scholars' understanding of consumer anger. It offers an improved conceptualisation of this emotion, opening new avenues for future research.

Keywords Anger, Outrage, Contempt, Consumer revenge, Boycott, Service failure

Paper type Literature review

Introduction

Over the last two decades, marketers have examined exit decisions (Hirschman, 1970), customer complaints (Grégoire and Fisher, 2008), negative word-of-mouth (Wetzer *et al.*, 2007), and participation in organized protests (Bougie *et al.*, 2003). Anger, and related negative emotions (Romani *et al.*, 2012; Shaver *et al.*, 1987), play an important role in these contexts. Considering its motivational role in retaliation and aggression (Berkowitz and Harmon-Jones, 2004), marketers adopt anger as a key mediator in explaining consumer revenge (Bechwati and Morrin, 2003; Grégoire *et al.*, 2010).

A significant body of work explores the nature and potential consequences of anger at the firm in a marketing context. Consumer anger is caused by different types of violations (Bougie *et al.*, 2004; Grappi *et al.*, 2013b) and triggers negative consequences for the organization (Romani *et al.*, 2012; Wetzer *et al.*, 2007). The existing research, however, belongs to different domains and presents a complex picture. While some argue that anger has a key role in explaining consumers' vindictiveness and a desire to hurt the company (Grégoire *et al.*, 2010; Wetzer *et al.*, 2007), others have maintained that the emotion is mostly focused on the attainment of exchange goals and can help foster productive market relationships (Romani *et al.*, 2013).

This study offers an integrative review of consumer anger literature to 1) summarise the existing body of knowledge produced across different research fields, 2) clarify the conceptualisation of this emotion, 3) reconcile presumed inconsistencies in existing research, and 4) identify gaps in current knowledge. It is argued that anger at the firm is best conceptualised as occurring in two different types: *vengeful* anger and *problem-focused* anger differentiated on the basis of their motivational goals and the consequences the goals generate for consumer-company relationships (Lazarus, 1991; Roseman *et al.*, 1994). These goals co-

exist with the emotional experience (Kappas, 2006) but current marketing research fails to outline their importance. While *vengeful* anger leads to the desire to hurt the company, either directly or indirectly, *problem-focused* anger focuses attention on a specific outcome that is being frustrated. This second form of anger, if managed adequately, can benefit organizations and is not a relational threat. Furthermore, the review reveals an association between these two types and distinct appraisals, arousal levels, forms of emotion expression and different behaviours. These components mix to form different anger scripts characterizing consumer reactions in most situations.

A better understanding of anger will assist managers in predicting consumer behaviour and plan adequate responses. Current scales have no reliable way of differentiating between these two forms of anger. The paper demonstrates that accurate measures of anger in a marketing context need to include also an evaluation of the goals that are activated by the emotional experience. Several propositions are presented and their implications for future research are discussed in detail.

Approach to the review

This study integrates evidence from different research areas. The analysis started by deploying a search string - (anger OR rage OR outrage OR animosity OR annoyance OR displeasure) AND (customer OR consumer) - on the academic databases EBSCO Business Source Complete and ABI/INFORM Global. This process identified 126 articles that include anger as one of the main variables analysed and have appeared in leading journals including the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *Journal of Consumer Research*, *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *International Journal of Business Studies*, *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *Journal of Service Research*, *Journal of Business*

Research, *European Journal of Marketing*, *Marketing Letters*, *Psychology & Marketing*, and the *Journal of Business Ethics*. The papers belong to four research domains: consumer animosity in international marketing (37 papers), anger at service failure and/or service employees (48 papers), anger as a consequence of unethical corporate behaviour (16 papers) and anger in consumer psychology (25 papers). While reading these papers, 68 additional manuscripts were added as relevant to the study (Dixon-Woods *et al.*, 2006). This generated a total of 193 peer-reviewed manuscripts which form the bulk of the data reviewed in this study covering a period from 1976 to 2015.

In a second less structured review stage, the evidence from marketing was complemented with literature outside the discipline. This process involved 83 articles and/or book chapters on anger that were identified through 1) searches on leading journals in social psychology, and 2) searches on the references cited by marketing manuscripts¹. Initially the review focused on the seminal articles from social psychology. Subsequently, the focus extended to a broader review of work by key authors (e.g. Frijda, Lazarus, Roseman, Russell) as well as papers from journals focusing on emotions (e.g. *Cognition and Emotion*, *Emotion*, *Emotion Review*).

The process was concluded once theoretical saturation (Bowen, 2008) allowed explaining the findings in the literature without the need of additional insights.

Anger at the firm: the need for a re-conceptualisation

Anger in marketing: one emotion, many definitions

Appraisal theories see anger as differentiated from other emotions on several cognitive dimensions (Roseman *et al.*, 1990; Scherer, 1988). Anger is experienced when individuals

appraise a negative outcome which is perceived as caused by others (Roseman *et al.*, 1990).

However, research has demonstrated that, while only these two appraisals are necessary to feel anger (Kuppens *et al.*, 2003; Van Mechelen and Hennes, 2009), many other dimensions can contribute to shape anger experiences (Roseman, 2004). Anger is also shaped by the social and cultural context in significant ways (Russell and Fehr, 1994; Tombs *et al.*, 2014).

Marketers adopt several different definitions of anger. Table 1 offers a sample of definitions from research on service failures. Although a number of traits are common across definitions, there are also significant differences. Some authors see aggression as a constitutive component (e.g. #1). Equally blame attribution is cited (e.g. #4, #5 and #6) while some emphasise fairness judgments (e.g. #3). Finally, for some anger is a high arousal emotion (e.g. #1). These examples illustrate a common trend: the definitions are not contradictory but they demonstrate how anger can have different meanings depending on the context analysed (Lazarus, 1991; p. 824).

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Anger-related emotions in marketing

Table 2 reviews emotions related to anger. A few studies focus on annoyance (Han *et al.*, 2010; Lee and McGowan, 1998) and frustration (Gelbrich, 2010; Patterson *et al.*, 2009; Van Steenburg *et al.*, 2013). These are negative experiences usually less intense than anger (Kalamas *et al.*, 2008) and less influenced by blame attributions (Gelbrich, 2010). Anxiety can cause anger (Taylor, 1994) and lead to a sense of dissatisfaction with the firm which can turn into anger (Maute and Dubé, 1999; Menon and Dubé, 2000). This emotion, similar to

annoyance and frustration, is not intense enough to cause vindictiveness and is associated with uncertainty which defuses the urge for confrontation (Patterson *et al.*, 2009; Surachartkumtonkun *et al.*, 2015).

Conversely, consumer rage (Grove *et al.*, 2012; McColl-Kennedy *et al.*, 2009) and outrage (Gelbrich, 2011) trigger a desire to hurt the firm. Anger as a trigger of confrontation is integral to rage (Grove *et al.*, 2004; McColl-Kennedy *et al.*, 2009; Surachartkumtonkun *et al.*, 2015). The appraisals shaping this form of anger confer a different meaning to the experience and create different expectations (Frijda 1993; Parkinson and Manstead 1993; Roseman 1991). Customer rage occurs as the outcome of repeated failures and involves several negative states (Surachartkumtonkun *et al.*, 2015). There is also research examining contempt and disgust following irresponsible corporate behaviour. These feelings are activated by specific violations and trigger different responses. Contempt triggers a desire to hurt the company while the role of disgust appears less clear (Romani *et al.*, 2013). Finally, researchers examine anger triggered by justice violations (Antonetti and Maklan, 2014; Lindenmeier *et al.*, 2012) reinforcing the evidence of the moral relevance of this emotion (Darley and Pittman, 2003).

Although these emotions have unique features, they are closely linked with anger. The boundaries between experiences are contextual and difficult to generalize: different scripts apply to varying circumstances (Barrett *et al.*, 2007).

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Revisiting anger's conceptualisation

Although the diversity of anger experiences has been acknowledged in psychology (Kuppens *et al.*, 2004; Russell and Barrett, 1999; Russell and Fehr, 1994), this characteristic is less understood in marketing research. When reporting findings on the consequences of anger, scholars assume that anger operates in the same way across contexts (see Romani *et al.*, 2013, p. 1038). Academics disagree on how the emotion affects customer-company relationships. While some consider anger as a destructive motivation of vindictiveness (Grégoire *et al.*, 2010; Wetzer *et al.*, 2007), others see anger as a warning signal highlighting problems that corporations can address while not implying a willingness to hurt the company (Bennett, 1997; Kalamas *et al.*, 2008; Romani *et al.*, 2013). Both interpretations can be right. Failing to recognise the intrinsic variability of anger experiences leads to overlooking the possibility that anger can have both positive and destructive consequences depending on the type of anger activated.

This imprecise conceptualisation is reflected in flawed measurement tools proposed in the literature. Practitioners, armed with academic scales purportedly measuring “anger” (e.g. Laros and Steenkamp, 2005; Romani *et al.*, 2012), can assess the emotional reactions of their customers to different stimuli. Their responses to feelings of anger, however, will often be flawed because based on the assumption that anger activates the same goals in all contexts. If they follow the advice of those who see anger as always destructive, at least some of the time, they will waste resources on compensations for consumers who had no intentions of leaving the brand. Conversely, if they conceive anger as a constructive social emotion, they might misinterpret serious relational threats as relatively minor issues.

P1: Experiences of anger vary in terms of the 1) motivational goals activated, 2) intensity, 3) appraisals and 4) consequences on the relationship between the firm and its consumers.

Problem-focused and vengeful anger

In *vengeful* anger the motivational goals activated by the emotion (Lazarus, 1991; Roseman *et al.*, 1994) create a desire to “get even” with the firm. In these circumstances, personal costs and benefits become secondary and the desire to hurt the perceived culprit dominates personal motives (Bechwati and Morrin, 2003; Fehr and Gächter, 2002). The second form of anger is instead based on the activation of *problem-focused* goals: consumers want to relieve the frustration caused by a thwarted objective and remain focused on the outcome (Fischer and Roseman, 2007; Scherer, 1988).

The difference between the two types of anger rests on whether the negative outcome is perceived as a breach of rules that are so important to deserve punishment and retribution (Carlsmith *et al.*, 2002; Fehr and Gächter, 2002). If a company is exploiting basic social norms of cooperation, individuals’ motives are affected and concern for personal interests is supplanted by a desire to punish the culprit to re-establish a sense of justice (Carlsmith *et al.*, 2002). Retribution can be motivated by concern for the harm caused (Carlsmith, 2008) or by a perceived affront to personal integrity (Yamagishi *et al.*, 2009).

The notion that anger can be both constructive and destructive is consistent with psychological theory (Averill, 1982; Fischer and Roseman, 2007; Tiedens *et al.*, 2002). The fact that one type can morph into the other easily makes identification difficult (Geddes and Callister, 2007; Russell and Fehr, 1994). Furthermore, although the differences in goal activation are associated with patterns of appraisals, intensity and expression, such variations emerge from the evidence but they are not necessary (see Van Mechelen and Hennes, 2009).

Different scripts can emerge depending on situational and personal variables. Nonetheless, it is possible to differentiate typical forms of both *vengeful* and *problem-focused* anger from less common forms of anger experiences. Although it is of critical importance for marketers to understand and assess the motivational goals associated with different anger experiences, such differences remain variable to contextual and personal variables.

P2a: The motivational goals activated during anger episodes allow differentiating between a type of anger focused on problem resolution (*problem-focused* anger) and a type of anger focused on revenge (*vengeful* anger).

P2b: Differences in goals and relational consequences are associated with 1) appraisals, 2) intensity and 3) emotion expression.

Motivational goals and marketing implications

Different motivational goals imply different expectations that characterise consumers' reactions (Roseman *et al.*, 1994). Since goal incongruence is central to *problem-focused* anger, individual attention remains on finding a resolution (Duhachek, 2005), in expectation that the firm will resolve the situation. If the firm proceeds to do so, the incident will be resolved (Romani *et al.*, 2013). There is no evidence that anger will necessarily lead to a desire for revenge (Grégoire *et al.*, 2010; Wetzer *et al.*, 2007).

P3: *Problem-focused* anger generates an expectation that the company will solve the problem created.

If the goal is punishment, different expectations and views of the company will be triggered. The desire for retribution is caused by seeing the company as deviant and deserving of punishment (Carlsmith *et al.*, 2002), and it implies a lower sensitivity towards individual

costs one will incur (Fehr and Gächter, 2002) and the attribution of failure to permanent features of the organization rather than to situational factors (Ybarra, 2002; Weiner, 1993). This anger script generates rumination about the incident (Porath *et al.*, 2010; Strizhakova *et al.*, 2012), leading to a lasting negative view of the organization.

P4: *Vengeful* anger creates a lasting negative view of the experience which affects the reputation of the organization.

Crossing-over between anger experiences

While *problem-focused* anger can dissipate without long-term damage, companies should look out for the “tipping points” (Patterson *et al.*, 2009) which lead to *vengeful* reactions. Once hostility increases, anger is more closely associated with damaging emotions such as contempt (Fischer and Roseman, 2007). After repeated failures at recovery, anger turns into dysfunctional feelings of rage (Surachartkumtonkun *et al.*, 2015). Although scholars stress this transition, there is little systematic research on it.

The majority of rage incidents start from minor negative experiences and more troubling emotions evolve as customers continue being dissatisfied with the company’s responses (Patterson *et al.*, 2009; Surachartkumtonkun *et al.*, 2015). A second tipping point is located in the transformation of momentary rage into long-term resentment and desire for vengeance (Patterson *et al.*, 2009).

P5: Repeated failures to address a problem transform *problem-focused* anger into *vengeful* anger.

Past research has not studied the specific factors that facilitate the transition from one type of anger to the other. Existing research however suggests that personal beliefs about the

company (Cronin *et al.*, 2012) and repeated negative experiences with a firm (Patterson *et al.*, 2009; Joireman *et al.*, 2013; Surachartkumtonkun *et al.*, 2015) facilitate the emergence of *vengeful* anger. These factors facilitate a mutation of anger into a relationally damaging emotion (Averill, 1982; Fischer and Roseman, 2007). If consumers already have a negative view of the firm, they are more likely to interpret misbehaviour as a sign of deviance that deserves punishment.

P6: Pre-existing negative views and/or past negative experiences, increase the likelihood of *problem-focused* anger mutating into *vengeful* anger.

Psychological research suggests that the way we interpret anger-eliciting circumstances has also much to do with our personality. Xie and colleagues (2015) find that, in reactions to irresponsible corporate behaviour, individuals with altruistic values and strong empathic concern, are more likely to feel anger. Similarly, trait anger might make people more reactive to anger-eliciting events and could facilitate the cross-over from *problem-focused* to *vengeful* anger (Spielberger *et al.*, 1983). Research suggests that agreeableness and conscientiousness tend to be inversely related to anger and aggression (Egan and Campbell, 2009; Pease and Lewis, 2015). These variables might facilitate a type of anger focused on the problem and make vengefulness less likely. Future research can identify further personal and contextual variables that affect the cross-over between the two types of anger.

Anger also transfers from one target (e.g. an employee) to another (e.g. the company). Research show that anger at employees transfers to affect emotions experienced towards a firm (Koppitsch *et al.*, 2013; Porath *et al.*, 2010). Consumer animosity research also offers related evidence since our dislike towards a country of origin affects the perception of its companies and products (Harmeling *et al.*, 2015). Nonetheless, more research is needed to understand in depth this transference process and its implications.

Appraisals of anger experiences

Two appraisal processes (Table 3) are usually associated with *problem-focused* anger: outcome desirability and attribution of responsibility. In reactions to unethical corporate behaviour, the perception of a moral violation coupled with blame attribution are sufficient to generate anger (Grappi *et al.*, 2013a; Grappi *et al.*, 2013b; Lindenmeier *et al.*, 2012). Similarly, within research on product/service failure, dissatisfaction with performance and viewing the company as responsible cause anger (Chang *et al.*, 2014; Folkes, 1984).

P7: *Problem-focused* anger is most often based on appraisals of a negative outcome perceived as a direct or indirect responsibility of the organization.

Vengeful anger is associated with a broader range of appraisals (Antonetti and Maklan, 2014; Cronin *et al.*, 2012) linked with punishment of deviance (Carlsmith *et al.*, 2002). Usually consumers evaluate 1) the severity of the failure (Antonetti and Maklan, 2014; Grégoire *et al.*, 2010); 2) the type of needs affected (McColl-Kennedy and Sparks, 2003; Surachartkumtonkun *et al.*, 2013); 3) and the motives underpinning the failure (Joireman *et al.*, 2013). When appraisals include these evaluations, anger is linked with a desire for revenge (Grégoire *et al.*, 2010; Joireman *et al.*, 2013). Psychological research shows how these appraisals dominate motives for punishment (Carlsmith, 2008; Carlsmith *et al.*, 2002)

P8: *Vengeful* anger is based on more complex and numerous appraisal processes than problem-focused anger. In addition to a negative outcome for which the organization is held responsible, *vengeful* anger comprises perceptions of: 1) injustice, 2) severe violations of fundamental social norms, and 3) exploitative motives attributable to the organization.

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

Intensity of the anger experiences

In most studies anger is portrayed as a strong emotion with intense arousal (Beck and Fernandez, 1998). Nonetheless anger's intensity varies (Heylen *et al.*, 2015). Marketers seem to assume that troubling forms of anger are characterised by intense emotions (Kalamas *et al.*, 2008). The difference between a "colder" anger, with potentially constructive consequences, and a more dysfunctional "hot" anger, is consistent with appraisal theories. "Hot anger" is driven by the perception of intentionality and negative inferences about the character of the offender (Scherer, 1988; Scherer, 1986). On the other hand, "cold anger" is associated with attributions of negligence rather than intention (Scherer, 1988; Scherer, 1986). Marketing research is consistent with this view, portraying *vengeful* anger as an intense emotion and *problem-focused* anger as a "colder" state (Chang *et al.*, 2014; Kalamas *et al.*, 2008; Grégoire *et al.*, 2010). It is reasonable to expect more intense feelings of anger to be associated with the dysfunctional forms of this emotion since *vengeful* anger can be irrational and damage individual self-interest (Yamagishi *et al.*, 2009). Scholars have also found that when more appraisals are relevant to anger, the emotion is likely to be perceived as more intense (Van Mechelen and Hennes, 2009).

P9: *Vengeful* anger is usually more intense than *problem-focused* anger.

Appraisals of personal relevance

Marketers do not address how appraisals of personal relevance shape anger. Psychologists differentiate between *personal* and *empathic* anger (Batson *et al.*, 2007). While the former is experienced when personal goals are hampered, the latter results from violations which harm others.

Consistent with appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1991; Roseman *et al.*, 1990), personal anger is more intense. Angry reactions are stronger when the victims are close to the self (Batson *et al.*, 2009; Gordjin *et al.*, 2001). This argument is consistent with social identity theory (Haslam and Ellemers, 2005) and research on consumer animosity. National identity shapes anger against countries perceived as historical/political enemies (Huang *et al.*, 2010; Klein *et al.*, 1998). Animosity, shared culturally as part of one's national experience, transfers to bias product judgement, demonstrating the influence of social identity on consumer behaviour.

The evidence reviewed suggests that, when anger is intense, individuals are more likely to engage in counterfactual thinking and examine the motives underpinning the company's reactions (McColl-Kennedy and Sparks, 2003). This process is more likely to lead to *vengeful* anger (Joireman *et al.*, 2013). As the seriousness of the violation increases and is perceived as more personally relevant it is likely that individuals will react in dysfunctional ways (Rimé, 1995).

P10: Experiences of anger at the firm are more likely to be stronger (weaker) and *vengeful (problem-focused)* when the violation affects the self (rather than others), or close others (rather than distant others).

Relational consequences of anger experiences

Anger is an approach-oriented (Roseman *et al.*, 1994) or agonistic (Nesse, 1990) emotion which motivates a desire to retaliate against the offender (Table 4). Such antagonistic behaviour, however, can be motivated by different goals (Roseman *et al.*, 1994).

INSERT TABLE 4

In the case of *problem-focused* anger, aggressive tendencies are instrumental (Berkowitz, 1993). Individuals display passion to obtain certain goals (e.g. strategic versus vindictive complaining). In negotiations communicating anger can be a tactic to extract more value from the counterpart (Sinaceur *et al.*, 2011; Van Kleef *et al.*, 2010). Customers experiencing *problem-focused* anger attack the organization (e.g. complaining) to gain something they value and expect (Kowalski, 1996).

P11: *Problem-focused* anger leads to goal attainment strategies. Typically, these include displays of strategic aggression.

Vengeful anger activates a desire to damage the company (Bougie *et al.*, 2003; Grégoire *et al.*, 2010; Wetzer *et al.*, 2007). When retaliation becomes the goal of individual behaviour, rational considerations become less important (Bechwati and Morrin, 2003). Evidence shows how individuals go to great lengths to punish deviant corporations (see Ward and Ostrom, 2006).

Vengeful anger is therefore likely to motivate affective rather than instrumental aggression (Berkowitz, 1993). The desire to hurt the company does not simply replace the motivation to address the goal, it tends to co-exist with it and jointly drive behavioural reactions (Tedeschi and Felson, 1994; Bushman and Anderson, 2001). It becomes part of the emotional experience building upon pre-existing motivations. Consumers feeling *vengeful* anger will

protest against the company directly and/or indirectly (Grégoire *et al.*, 2010) with the specific goal of damaging its interests (Romani *et al.*, 2013).

P12: *Vengeful* anger leads to strategies aimed at punishing a deviant corporation and restoring a sense of justice. Typically, these include displays of affective aggression.

Anger communication

The way anger is communicated has a positive or negative effect on interpersonal dynamics (Geddes and Callister, 2007; Stickney and Geddes, 2014); especially in service encounters where consumers interact with the organization directly.

The desire to vent frustration and find emotional support might lead to confrontation (Menon and Dubé, 2000; Menon and Dubé, 2007). Venting anger improves mood (Bushman *et al.*, 2001) and can lead to a catharsis beneficial both for customers, who get an emotional release, and for the company, which can learn how to improve from its mistakes (Bennett, 1997; Nyer, 2000). However, these emotional benefits do not apply to cases of *vengeful* anger when emotional experiences might need to be contained by the firm to protect itself and its employees (Grove *et al.*, 2004; Patterson *et al.*, 2009).

Literature on customer rage documents instances where anger is expressed in deviant forms not deemed socially and culturally acceptable (McColl-Kennedy *et al.*, 2009). This form of “deviant anger” (Geddes and Callister, 2007) associated with *vengefulness* is usually linked with a perceived sense of unfairness (McColl-Kennedy and Sparks, 2003) and intense arousal (Grégoire *et al.*, 2010). Economists find that participants in experiments reject unfair offers even when their rejection is not communicated to the other players and does not damage the other party (Yamagishi *et al.*, 2009). Anger at unfairness creates a commitment to

punishment that is irrational and independent even of one's ability to punish the perpetrator (Fehr and Gächter, 2002).

Since *problem-focused* anger is based on the desire to achieve a goal, individuals are more likely to display the emotion strategically to obtain cooperation. Displays of anger can be used instrumentally to favour positive exchanges (Van Kleef *et al.*, 2004). *Problem-focused* anger is associated with what Geddes and Callister (2007) call "expressed anger". Consumers expect the company to fix the problem and they will communicate their disappointment without alienating the counterpart. Individuals are able to send messages through anger displays that communicate toughness and try to extract better conditions (Sinaceur and Tiedens, 2006; Van Kleef *et al.* 2004). Their ability to express anger in a socially acceptable way will influence the likelihood of resolving the incident positively.

Anger can be reliably identified through non-verbal expressions (Elfenbein and Ambady, 2002). However, since the differentiation between *vengeful* and *problem-focused* anger is based on goal activation and appraisals, the two types of anger cannot be differentiated on the basis of non-verbal cues. Nonetheless, customers typically complain through a mixture of verbal and non-verbal communications (e.g. Tombs *et al.*, 2014). Service personnel can be trained to identify "expressed" and "deviant" forms of anger. Such training would help differentiating between *vengeful* and *problem-focused* instances of anger communication.

The context however matters in determining the appropriateness of a specific form of anger expression (Geddes and Callister, 2007). Although abuse of employees is always inappropriate, other reactions such as raising one's voice might be construed differently in different cultures. Anger expression is constrained culturally (Park *et al.*, 2013). Individual skills might also influence the ability to communicate *problem-focused* anger effectively. A customer with low emotional intelligence could express anger in dysfunctional ways (Geddes

and Callister, 2007). In this case interactions might escalate to the development of feelings of revenge.

P13: *Vengeful* anger is more likely to be communicated in ways that are socially and culturally unacceptable. *Problem-focused* anger is more likely to be communicated instrumentally and matching relevant interpersonal norms.

Response strategies

Companies need specific response strategies to tackle different forms of anger (Ren and Gray, 2009; Smith *et al.*, 1999). There are several responses potentially available to corporations (Coombs, 2007).

Denial strategies comprise, in addition to simply contesting the crisis or failure, activities aimed at confronting the accuser and/or finding a scapegoat (Coombs, 2007). Although there are situations when some form of denial is productive (Kim *et al.*, 2004), this response is unlikely to yield positive results when confronting angry customers. Individuals protect themselves from unpleasant experiences (Tamir *et al.*, 2015); consequently, feeling anger indicates that the problem cannot simply be denied. Those holding negative beliefs about the organization (McDonald *et al.*, 2010), might interpret denials as negative reinforcements. A signal that the company is too corrupt to acknowledge the problem.

P14: Denial strategies are ineffective in assuaging both *problem-focused* and *vengeful* anger.

Organizations can offer explanations clarifying the reasons behind the failure (Grewal *et al.*, 2008) and/or diminishing the perceived negativity of the event (Bonifield and Cole, 2008). Explanations are more effective than failing to respond (Bitner, 1990; Vazquez-Casielles *et*

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2
3 *al.*, 2012) and sometimes sufficient to improve reactions (Grewal *et al.*, 2008). The provision
4
5 of downward social comparison information, messages suggesting that for other customers'
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7 things have been worse, may assuage customers' anger (Bonifield and Cole, 2008).
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9 Explanations are effective only for *problem-focused* anger. Confrontational individuals are
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11 unlikely to be satisfied by them. The desire for retribution requires a rebalance (emotional or
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13 financial) between victim and offender (Bradfield and Aquino, 1999; Dirks *et al.*, 2009).
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17 **P15:** Explanation strategies are more effective in assuaging *problem-focused* anger
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19 than *vengeful* anger.
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23 A reprimand of a service employee can alleviate feelings of anger and intentions to retaliate
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25 (Koppitsch *et al.*, 2013). A reprimand, effective when it acknowledges customer harm, does
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27 not reduce anger towards the employee but it distances the company from the offender
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29 (Koppitsch *et al.*, 2013). Further research is needed to be able to draw firm conclusions on
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31 the effectiveness of reprimands on different forms of anger.
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35 Corporations can also respond through apologies that involve an admission of responsibility.
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37 Effective apologies acknowledge full responsibility for the negative event (Lee and Chung,
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39 2012) and can be costly in the short term since liability might lead to compensations (Fuchs-
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41 Burnett, 2002). If reparations are not possible, and the harm caused is moderate, apologies
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43 can maintain the relationship (Ohbuchi *et al.*, 1989). Sincere and empathetic apologies
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45 (Byrne *et al.*, 2014; Roschk and Kaiser, 2013), communicated after preventable crises
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47 (Grappi and Romani, 2015), inhibit aggression. Crisis communication research documents
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49 the relative effectiveness of apologies in anger reduction (Pace *et al.*, 2010; Verhoeven *et al.*,
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51 2012), especially when regret is expressed (Pace *et al.*, 2010; Van der Meer and Verhoeven,
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53 2014). Nonetheless, this strategy might not alleviate *vengeful* anger. One of the objectives of
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55 apologies is to avoid negative inferences generated from one single incident (Ybarra, 2002).
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To the extent that vengeful individuals question the character of the company, they have already made such destructive inferences (Porath *et al.*, 2010) and will therefore be less receptive to apologies (Tomlinson *et al.*, 2004; Roschk and Kaiser, 2013).

P16: Apologies are more effective in assuaging *problem-focused* anger than *vengeful* anger.

Compensation is the most effective strategy to deal with all instances of anger. It implies apology, which rebalances emotional distress (Ohbuchi *et al.*, 1989), and it is also likely to improve the perception of the organization's motives (Desmet *et al.*, 2011; Joireman *et al.*, 2013). Since a negative view of the company is a key appraisal of *vengeful* anger, this approach encourages reconciliation and rebuilds trust irrespective of the form of anger individuals are experiencing.

P17: Compensation strategies are effective in assuaging both *problem-focused* and *vengeful* anger.

A plurality of tools should be used in cases of very intense anger. The intensity of the negative affect should be reduced (Grove *et al.*, 2004; Menon and Dubé, 2007) to avoid an escalation into rage when the relationship might be permanently damaged (Patterson *et al.*, 2009). Monitoring systems allow companies to detect complaints early and deal with them effectively (Patterson *et al.*, 2009; Surachartkumtonkun *et al.*, 2015).

Discussion

A typology of anger experiences

There are two types of anger: *problem-focused* anger, associated with the desire to resolve a problem, and *vengeful* anger, linked with revenge. In addition to the relational consequences, research suggests that they have a typical script that characterise them in most marketing contexts (Table 5). *Vengeful* anger presents extended appraisal processes, high intensity and deviant expression. *Problem-focused* anger implies few appraisals, a lower intensity and strategic expression. The variability of anger experiences however means that atypical scripts are possible. For example, it is possible that consumers with propensity to feelings of anger (Spielberger *et al.*, 1983) might experience strong arousal and express themselves in socially unacceptable ways even in cases of *problem-focused* anger (Geddes and Callister, 2007). Atypical scripts retain the motivational goal and relational consequences but are formed by different combinations of appraisals, intensity and expression that reflect specific circumstances. Future research can test the typology presented and the typicality of anger scripts in consumer behaviour.

INSERT TABLE 5 HERE

Research is necessary to explore the cross-over between types of anger (Geddes and Callister, 2007) in different marketing contexts. There is partial support for proposition 5, at least in customer rage at service failure (Surachartkumtonkun *et al.*, 2015). However, only few investigations have analysed such processes longitudinally and much remains unclear on the transition from *problem-focused* to *vengeful* anger.

Identifying the two types of anger

The research raises implications for the measurement of anger. The two types are based on goal differences and cannot be identified through the expression displayed. Existing scales, however, do not clarify what form is being measured. Laros and Steenkamp (2005) measure anger through a five-point Likert scale (1 = I feel this emotion not at all, 5 = I feel this emotion very strongly) applied to relevant words (angry, frustrated, irritated, hostility, unfulfilled, discontented). Similarly, a scale measuring negative emotions towards brands (Romani *et al.*, 2012), asks participants to what extent (from 1 = not at all to 7 = very much) they feel indignant, annoyed and resentful. These two representative examples show that current scales cannot capture the goals associated with anger. Research should develop more nuanced scales which incorporate goals, appraisals and relational consequences; avoiding generic lists of adjectives or nouns. For example, some scholars have measured anger together with desire for revenge (e.g. Grégoire *et al.*, 2010). Linking emotion words with revenge goals offers a useful venue for the development of scales that allow identifying the two types of anger.

The differentiation between types of anger can assist service personnel during interpersonal encounters. Employees can be trained in recognising *vengeful* and *problem-focused* anger from verbal and non-verbal reactions. Employees should realise that dysfunctional anger expression is likely a sign of *vengeful* anger. Consequently, they should respond with strategies that might be effective in assuaging this type of anger. Employees can also examine the appraisals underpinning anger that customers will communicate when complaining. Customers experiencing a delay might feel angry towards the company. Some of them, however, might describe the delay as unfair and a sign of an uncaring organization. These consumers, according to the typology, will be more likely to experience *vengeful* anger. Others, might complain about the inconvenience, stressing the negative consequences caused.

These are signs of *problem-focused* anger. Service personnel trained about the specific features of anger can identify the types and react accordingly (Menon and Dubé, 2000).

Implications for future research

The propositions presented offer implications for future empirical research. The differences between *problem-focused* and *vengeful* anger imply two different conceptual models (Figure 1 and 2) that can be tested empirically. The models include specific appraisals and consequences. Once operationalised in a research context they can be tested following procedures scholars have already employed in the past to study anger (e.g. Grégoire *et al.*, 2010).

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

Proposition 10 can be tested experimentally by evaluating situations that vary exclusively in the identity of the party affected by a corporate violation. Research which has examined the influence of personal relevance on anger focuses on peculiar contexts (e.g. Batson *et al.*, 2009 work on torture) and consequently further research is needed to test this proposition in realistic marketing contexts.

Propositions 14 to 17 can be tested in lab experiments where different strategies are examined as potential resolutions to company-consumer interactions able to elicit the different forms of anger. Such research, however, will need to develop from preliminary analyses that establish

which factors trigger the different forms of anger. The paper does not examine combinations of responses (e.g. explanation and apology) because research in this area is still at early stages of development. It would be useful to examine combinatorial approaches and outline best responses under different circumstances.

Research should also explore how anger is transferred from an individual responsible for corporate failure to the organization itself. Evidence shows that sometimes anger towards an employee translates into anger towards a company (Porath *et al.*, 2010). Further research can explore moderators of this effect. One interesting question is whether the hierarchical position of the employee responsible for the wrongdoing influences to what extent anger is transferred to the company. It might be that when leaders are responsible for wrongdoing anger translates more directly to the organization than when someone at lower levels is responsible for a failure. Unjust behaviour by powerful people might be 1) more diagnostic of the character of the organization since these individuals “set the tone” for organizational culture (Tsui *et al.*, 2006), and 2) more associated with brand identity, given their prominence within the firm. Future research can test this hypothesis.

Although a few studies analyse multiple failures at recovery leading to rage (Patterson *et al.*, 2009; Surachartkumtonkun *et al.*, 2015), no research has examined the opposite path and longitudinal research is needed to understand the steps that lead enraged consumers towards “colder” anger. Such research would clarify rage management and whether it is possible to rebuild a relationship after severe violations (Grove *et al.*, 2004).

Implications for practice

Although more research is needed before developing detailed protocols to differentiate the two types of anger, the arguments presented offer a first step in this direction and clarify the need to explore consumers' emotions in more depth to match consumer emotions with the right responses (Coombs, 2007).

Anger experiences are malleable and can be shaped by organizational reactions to an initial failure. A successful response towards *vengeful* anger might transform the emotional experience, focusing it on appraisals of goal incongruence and blame which are relatively less damaging for the organization (Figure 3). This might be an intermediate step before complete resolution. A correct diagnosis of the type of anger experienced is therefore necessary to manage failures successfully.

INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE

Finally, the analysis supports the idea of letting consumers express moderate feelings of *problem-focused* anger as a way to improve the relationship with the company and spot areas that require intervention (Bennett, 1997; Romani *et al.*, 2013). Anger is not always a relational threat and can be leveraged to understand problems and react accordingly.

Conclusions

A novel conceptualisation of anger is developed in this paper, contributing to our understanding of this emotion. Anger is central in many marketing phenomena as well as representing a common managerial concern in conflictual situations. This re-examination

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advances existing debates and develops better explanations about how angry consumers feel
and how they are likely to behave.

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¹ Originally 71 manuscripts had been reviewed however during the revision process an additional 12 papers were considered relevant. Three were recommended by an anonymous reviewer.

Problem-focused anger – Conceptual model

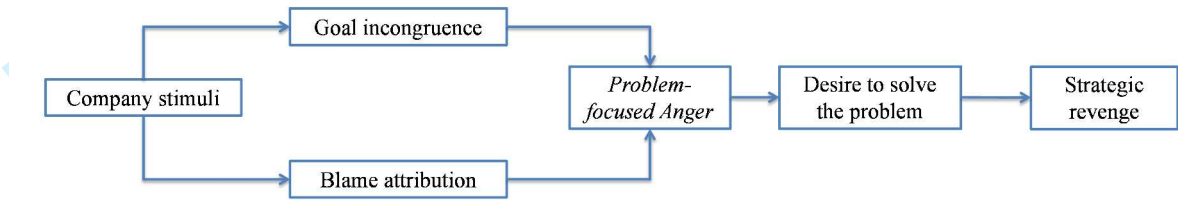


Figure 1: Conceptual model for Problem-focused Anger

Vengeful anger – Conceptual model

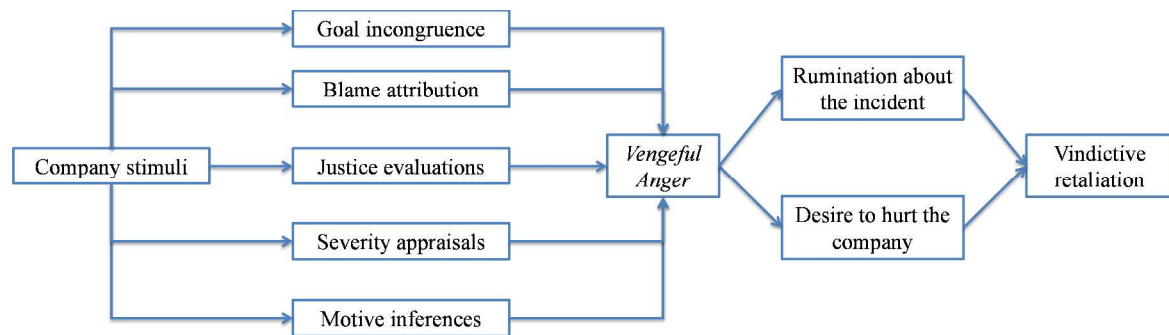


Figure 2: Conceptual model for Vengeful Anger

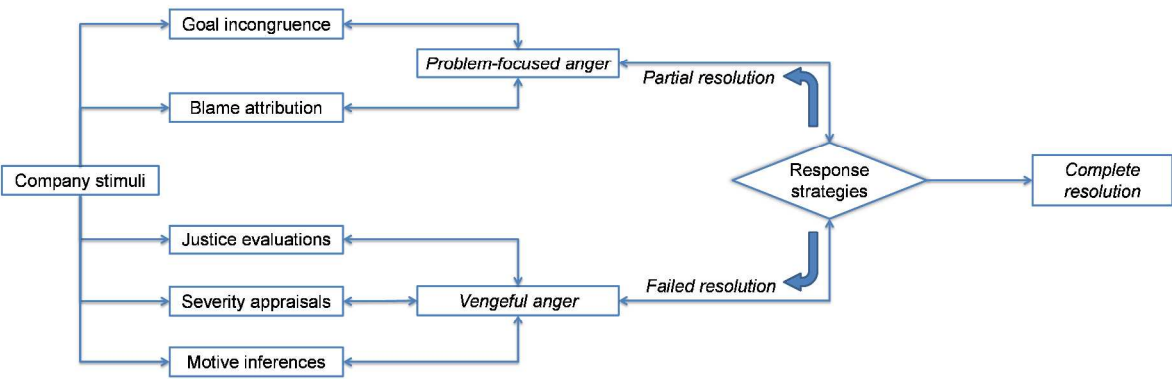


Figure 3: Management of anger experiences

Table 1: Definitions of anger in the service marketing literature

#	Definition	Source	Objectives of the study
1	"a strong emotion that involves an impulse to respond and react"	Grégoire <i>et al.</i> , 2010, p. 742	Development and testing of a customer revenge model.
2	"a retrospective emotion, which tends to occur when people attribute a goal incongruent event to external sources"	Gelbrich, 2010, p. 568	Examine the relative influence of anger (compared to frustration) in reactions to service failure.
3	"a common and morally relevant emotional reaction to a service failure"	He and Harris, 2014, p. 140	Test anger's influence on moral disengagement and the justification of vindictive customer behaviour.
4	"The key dimensions that distinguish anger from other negative emotions are certainty, control, and responsibility. Anger occurs as a result of individuals' appraisals of high other-responsibility for negative events and high other-control over these negative events"	Bonifield and Cole, 2007, p. 87	Postulate and test the role of anger in reactions to service failure and as a mediator in decisions to retaliate against the organization.
5	"anger in response to a service failure arises when customers appraise an event as unfair, with high service provider control [...] and a stable cause [...] anger is associated with appraisals of high goal relevance, goal incongruence and high coping potential"	Bougie <i>et al.</i> , 2003, p. 378	Test the unique effect of anger (controlling for dissatisfaction) on consumers' reactions.
6	"Anger episodes tend to be initiated by appraisals of an event as being significant to but incongruent with the consumption goals. [...] blame for any negative event will thus be directed towards the service provider, and the service provider, as the causal agent, will be expected to alleviate the problem."	Menon and Dubé, 2007, p. 269	Compare the relative effects of companies' service recovery strategy on customers' feelings of anger and anxiety.

Table 2: Other emotions within the anger prototype

Emotional label	Definition	Studies
Annoyance	No clear definition offered. Emotion measured as feelings of frustration, irritation, displeasure and disappointment.	Han <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Lee and McGowan, 1998
Anxiety	A feeling of negative surprise and distress caused by a product/service failure often associated with a lack of control.	Chebat and Slusarczyk, 2005; Maute and Dubé, 1999; Menon and Dubé, 2007; Menon and Dubé, 2000; Taylor, 1994
Frustration	“A retrospective emotion, which tends to occur when people attribute a goal incongruent event to situational factors”. (Gelbrich, 2010, p. 569)	Gelbrich, 2010; Patterson <i>et al.</i> , 2009; Steenburg <i>et al.</i> , 2013
Contempt	“A negatively valenced emotion characterised by disapproval of someone’s actions and feeling morally superior to them.” (Romani <i>et al.</i> , 2013, p. 1032)	Romani <i>et al.</i> , 2013; Grappi <i>et al.</i> , 2013a; Romani <i>et al.</i> , 2012; Kalamas <i>et al.</i> , 2008; Xie <i>et al.</i> , 2015
Disgust	Marketing accounts are based on research on the CAD triad hypothesis (Rozin <i>et al.</i> , 1999) which conceives disgust as elicited by violations of purity and/or sanctity (Grappi <i>et al.</i> , 2013a).	Grappi <i>et al.</i> , 2013a; Romani <i>et al.</i> , 2013; Chebat and Slusarczyk, 2005; Xie <i>et al.</i> , 2015
Moral outrage / Moral anger / Righteous anger	A type of anger caused by the violation of a moral principle.	Antonetti and Maklan, 2014; Lindenmeier <i>et al.</i> , 2012; Grappi <i>et al.</i> , 2013a; Romani <i>et al.</i> , 2013; Cronin <i>et al.</i> , 2012
Outrage	An extreme form of customer dissatisfaction with the product/service.	Gelbrich, 2011; Swanson and Davis, 2012; Schneider and Bowen, 1999; Vanhamme and Lindgreen, 2001
Rage	“A form of anger comprised of a spectrum of negative emotions including ferocity, fury, wrath, disgust, contempt, scorn and resentment.” (McColl-Kennedy <i>et al.</i> , 2009, p. 222). Rage episodes are usually described as particularly intense experiences of anger.	Grove <i>et al.</i> , 2004; Grove <i>et al.</i> , 2012; Kalamas <i>et al.</i> , 2008; McColl-Kennedy <i>et al.</i> , 2009; Patterson <i>et al.</i> , 2009; Surachartkumtonkun <i>et al.</i> , 2013

Table 3: Appraisals of different types of anger

Research context	Dominant type of anger experience	Antecedents	Key studies
Reactions to cases of irresponsible corporate behaviour	<i>Problem-focused anger</i>	Blame towards the corporation / Perceived responsibility	Antonetti and Maklan, 2014; Choi and Lin, 2009; Cronin <i>et al.</i> , 2012
		Perceived unfairness / Perceived inequity of corporate wrongdoing / Disconfirmation of a moral norm	Antonetti and Maklan, 2014; Braunsberger and Buckler, 2011; Grappi <i>et al.</i> , 2013a; Grappi <i>et al.</i> , 2013b; Lindenmeier <i>et al.</i> , 2012; Romani <i>et al.</i> , 2013
	<i>Vengeful anger</i>	Perceived greed	Antonetti and Maklan, 2014
		Individual ethical beliefs	Vassilikopoulou <i>et al.</i> , 2011
		Severity of the crisis / Perceived harm caused	Antonetti and Maklan, 2014; Cronin <i>et al.</i> , 2012
		Beliefs concerning the corporation involved	Cronin <i>et al.</i> , 2012
Reactions to product/service failure	<i>Problem-focused anger</i>	Dissatisfaction with a service	Antón <i>et al.</i> , 2007a; Antón <i>et al.</i> , 2007b; Chang <i>et al.</i> , 2014; Kalamas <i>et al.</i> , 2008; Koppitsch <i>et al.</i> , 2013
		Locus of the failure	Folkes, 1984; Bonifield and Cole, 2007; Gelbrich, 2010
		Controllability of service failure	Folkes, 1984; Bonifield and Cole, 2007; Gelbrich, 2010
	<i>Vengeful anger</i>	Repeated instances of failure	Patterson <i>et al.</i> , 2009; Schneider and Bowen, 1999
		Justice: procedural, interactional and distributive fairness	Grégoire <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Joreiman <i>et al.</i> , 2013; Vanhamme and Lindgreen, 2001
		Perceived greed / Inference about corporate motives	Grégoire <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Joreiman <i>et al.</i> , 2013
		Threats to basic human needs: self-esteem, control and fairness	Patterson <i>et al.</i> , 2009; Rose and Neidermeyer, 1999; Surachartkumtonkun <i>et al.</i> , 2013; Vanhamme and Lindgreen, 2001

Table 4: Consequences of feelings of anger

Research context	Dominant type of anger experience	Consequences	Key studies
Reactions to cases of irresponsible corporate behaviour	Problem-focused anger	Negative attitudes / Corporate reputation	Grappi and Romani, 2015; Grappi <i>et al.</i> , 2013b
		Negative word-of-mouth	Grappi and Romani, 2015; Grappi <i>et al.</i> , 2013a; Grappi <i>et al.</i> , 2013b; Romani <i>et al.</i> , 2013; Xie <i>et al.</i> , 2015
		Participation in boycotts / protests	Braunsberger and Buckler, 2011; Choi and Lin, 2009; Grappi and Romani, 2015; Grappi <i>et al.</i> , 2013; Romani <i>et al.</i> , 2013; Xie <i>et al.</i> , 2015
	Vengeful anger	Switching intentions / reduced loyalty	Cronin <i>et al.</i> , 2012; Vassilikopoulou <i>et al.</i> , 2011
		Negative word-of-mouth	Antonetti and Maklan, 2014; Lindenmeier <i>et al.</i> , 2012
		Participation in boycotts / protests	Cronin <i>et al.</i> , 2012; Gopaladas, 2014; Lindenmeier <i>et al.</i> , 2012
Reactions to product/service failure	Problem-focused anger	Complaining / protest to the organization	Beverland <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Bonifield and Cole, 2007; Casado Diaz and Ruiz, 2002; Kalamas <i>et al.</i> , 2008; Maute and Dubé, 1999; Yi and Baumgartner, 2004
		Switching intentions / reduced loyalty	Anton <i>et al.</i> , 2007a; Anton <i>et al.</i> , 2007b; Bennett, 1997; Beverland <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Bonifield and Cole, 2007; Chang <i>et al.</i> , 2014; Casado Diaz and Ruiz, 2002; Funches, 2011; Han <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Kalamas <i>et al.</i> , 2008; Lopez-Lopez <i>et al.</i> , 2014; Maute and Dubé, 1999; Roos, 1999
		Negative attitudes / Corporate reputation	Kalamas <i>et al.</i> , 2008; Vanhamme and Lindgreen, 2001
		Negative word-of-mouth	Bonifield and Cole, 2007; Chang <i>et al.</i> , 2014; Lopez-Lopez <i>et al.</i> , 2014;; Kalamas <i>et al.</i> , 2008; Maute and Dubé, 1999; Nyer, 1997; Wetzer <i>et al.</i> , 2007
		Participation in boycotts / protests	Folkes, 1984; Kalamas <i>et al.</i> , 2008
	Vengeful anger	Complaining / protest to the organization	Bougie <i>et al.</i> , 2003; Folkes, 1984; Gelbrich, 2010; Grégoire <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Joreiman <i>et al.</i> , 2013
		Switching intentions / reduced loyalty	Baker <i>et al.</i> , 2008; Bougie <i>et al.</i> , 2003; Porath <i>et al.</i> , 2011; Vanhamme and Lindgreen, 2001
		Negative attitudes / Corporate reputation	Porath <i>et al.</i> , 2010
		Negative word-of-mouth	Baker <i>et al.</i> , 2008; Bougie <i>et al.</i> , 2003; Gelbrich, 2010; Grégoire <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Joreiman <i>et al.</i> , 2013; Porath <i>et al.</i> , 2011; Vanhamme and Lindgreen, 2001
		Participation in boycotts / protests	Grégoire <i>et al.</i> , 2010; Joreiman <i>et al.</i> , 2013

Table 5: Typical scripts of the two types of anger

	Motivational goal	Relational consequences	Appraisals	Intensity	Expression
<i>Vengeful anger</i>	Desire to hurt the company	Seek punishment of the corporation	Extended appraisals	Hot	Deviant
<i>Problem-focused anger</i>	Desire to solve the problem	Seek problem resolution	Basic appraisals	Cold	Expressed